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EXCURSIONS IN ULSTER.

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LETTER I.—FROM BELFAST TO BELTURBET.

*Belturbet, 19th July, 1824.*

DEAR G——,

When we parted in Belfast on Saturday morning, you regretted you could not join our party to Lough Erne ; but expressed a wish to hear from me occasionally during our tour, and to have my opinion of the country through which we should pass. I now take advantage of a leisure hour to fulfil the promise I then made ; and hope to receive from you that indulgence you have always granted to my correspondence.

Our first day's journey lay through a part of the country so well known, that my account of it shall be comprised in a very few words ; and even had any thing particularly interesting presented itself, our mode of travelling, in the Armagh coach, would have prevented us from seeing it to advantage. The coach, besides a full load outside, contained within seven persons, including a child ; so you may suppose that room was rather a scarce commodity, and that we furnished a tolerably good practical illustration, of the old saying of philosophers, that " Nature abhors a vacuum." Still, however, our situation was far from being disagreeable. Good nature seemed to have also found a corner among us, and to have produced a spirit of mutual accommodation that carried us on merrily to the end of our journey. There was no lack of conversation either ; and there are few subjects which did not pass in review during our progress. We made, in fancy, a tour of Ireland ; circumnavigated the globe ; settled the affairs of India ; visited the Ionian islands ; discussed the merits of the most popular orators and actors ; formed extensive schemes of inland navigation ; Macadamised roads ; took a trip in the steam boat on Lough Neagh, of whose broad waters we occasionally caught a glimpse ; and, to end my catalogue, entered into all the topics of general conversation at the present day. Thus we passed gaily along, and in due course of time were safely set down in the ancient city of Armagh ; where, in a few minutes after, we found ourselves seated in Rodgers' hotel, in English street, a most comfortable and well regulated house.

After remaining a few hours in Armagh, where we dined, we hired a car for Monaghan ; anxiously pushing on for our

great object of attraction, Lough Erne. The road over which we passed was excellent ; so having got a merry driver and a willing horse, we advanced rapidly, passing the mile-stones in quick succession, and admiring as we went the rich crops that everywhere presented themselves to our notice. The evening was fine, and on the road we met crowds of people returning from the bogs, where they had been busily engaged in cutting turf for their winter's fuel ; all of whom we found civil and polite, and anxious to afford us every information in their power. Some of them informed us that they had been at a cock-fight, which appears to be a favourite amusement in this part of the country ; and they seemed willing to enter into details of the different encounters. But, as none of our party were amateurs, we bade them good evening, and soon afterwards arrived in Monaghan, where we had arranged to pass the night. Early next morning, we left Monaghan, certainly without much regret ; intending to breakfast at Clones, which is nine miles distant. The country through which we passed on the preceding day is very fine, but that from Monaghan to Clones is in some respects superior. The land is rich and well tilled ; every spot seems to be turned to the best advantage, and covered with luxuriant crops. On this road also we passed the demesnes of some of the Nobility and Gentry residing in the neighbourhood, which add considerably to the beauty of the country, by fine groves of trees and swelling hills covered with the richest verdure.

We arrived at Clones very late for breakfast, having got a stubborn horse at Monaghan, which, after the first mile, could not be induced to move a step without a man at his head,—though the driver continually informed us that “ it was all ill nature that ailed him, as he could travel beautifully when going home.” We now began to remember that a person who stood by as we set out, asked the man from whom we hired the car significantly, “ is that the great goer, Jack, you're giving the gentlemen ? ”—which was answered in the affirmative, with many marvellous accounts of the swiftness of the famous steed. No doubt all this was intended for wit ; but, as is generally the case, we who were partly the objects of it, did not enjoy the joke so well perhaps as the laughing crowd we left behind us in the Diamond, at Monaghan.

Clones is an ancient place, and contains many memorials of its antiquity ; on which account, contrary to our first plan, we determined to remain in it for some hours. The town is situated on the summit of a gradually ascending hill, in the midst of a beautiful country. In the Diamond, as the public square is called, is a curious Cross, which deserves the attention of strangers, on account of its great antiquity. The sides are

divided into compartments, on which striking events from holy writ are rudely sculptured ; but which, from age, it is now difficult to decypher. On a hill behind the parish church, is an ancient Fort or Rath, in good preservation ; commanding an extensive view of the surrounding country. In the parish burying-ground, situated in the low part of the town, and apparently very ancient, is a round tower ; which has sustained a good deal of injury from the effects of time, and lost a considerable part of the top. From its present apparent height, and from the circumstance of the ground having been raised around it by the forming of graves, it must, when in a perfect state, have been of great elevation. Among the tombs in the burying-ground, near the tower, is shown that of the M'Mahon family, once the powerful chieftains of this part of Ireland. The top of this sepulchre, which is above ground, is very heavy, and shaped like the roof of a house, with inscriptions on each of the sloping sides. The mode of sepulture, according to the tradition of the country, was curious. When the body of any of the family was brought hither for interment, it was taken out of the coffin and deposited in the tomb ; and the empty coffin was buried in a separate place. A quantity of lime was then thrown over the body for the purpose of consuming it, and the roof of the tomb replaced until it was again taken off to admit another tenant. Clones had at one time been the seat of a monastic establishment, and still contains the ruins of a small church, built of cut stone, and, in what remains of it, exhibiting a considerable degree of architectural skill. From a lady whom we met with here, and who seemed well versed in the antiquities of the place, we learned that there had in former times been some connexion between the monastic establishment at Clones and the station at Lough Dergh ; to such a degree, at least, that it was necessary for all pilgrims to pass through this town on their way, and most probably perform some religious service, before proceeding towards the holy Island.

We remained so long in Clones, that it was late when we arrived at Belturbet. Within a few miles of this place, we got our first view of some of the branches of Lough Erne, for which we had been anxiously looking out some time before ; and soon after passed the demesnes of Castle Saunderson, the plantations of which add considerably to the beauty of the country in this neighbourhood.

Belturbet is a small and uninteresting town, at the northern extremity of the County Cavan. It is situated on a branch of Lough Erne, which here resembles a narrow river more than a lake. At this place there is a large barrack, where a detachment of horse is generally quartered, on account of the

fine and cheap forage afforded by this rich country, and the facility of communication with the other parts of the province.

I am, dear G——, yours truly,

E—.

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LETTER II.—LOUGH ERNE.

*Enniskillen, 20th July, 1824.*

DEAR G——,

We arrived here late last night, after having spent the day most delightfully in sailing down the upper part of Lough Erne, and visiting the most remarkable places on its banks. Before I attempt to describe the part of the lake we have visited, I shall give you some general account of it, which will perhaps enable you to understand me better when I enter into details. As you know I am fond of any thing ancient, you will not be surprised when I introduce you to the venerable Camden, and quote his authority on this occasion. His accuracy indeed appears surprising, when we reflect how difficult it must have been in his time to procure information respecting this part of Ireland.

You will find the following account of Lough Erne in the very brief history of Fermanagh, given in his well-known *Britannia*.

“ Beyond Cavan, to the west and north, the county of Fermanagh presents itself, where anciently lived the Erdini; a woody and marshy country, in whose centre is the largest and most famous lake in Ireland: Lough Erne, 40 miles in extent, covered with thick woods and full of inhabited islands, some of them containing 100, 200, and 300 acres; so well stocked with pike, trout, salmon, and other fish, that the fishermen oftener complain of the excessive plenty of fish, and of the breaking of their nets, than of any scarcity. This lake stretches east and west, as described in the maps; but, as I have been informed by those who have fully surveyed it with attention, begins at Belturbet, the northernmost village of Cavan, and runs from south to north, 14 miles in length and 4 in breadth. It afterwards contracts itself like a regular river for 6 miles. On this part of it is Inniskillin, the principal fortress in these parts, which was defended by the rebels in 1593, and taken by the brave Captain Dowdall. Thence it turns itself to the west, 20 miles in length and 10 miles in breadth, as far as Belek, near which is a cataract and a most noble salmon leap.”

Camden, with great gravity, accounts for the formation of the lake by seriously telling us, that it was at one time a populous country, which, as a judgment on the inhabitants for their shocking crimes, was suddenly overflowed with water.